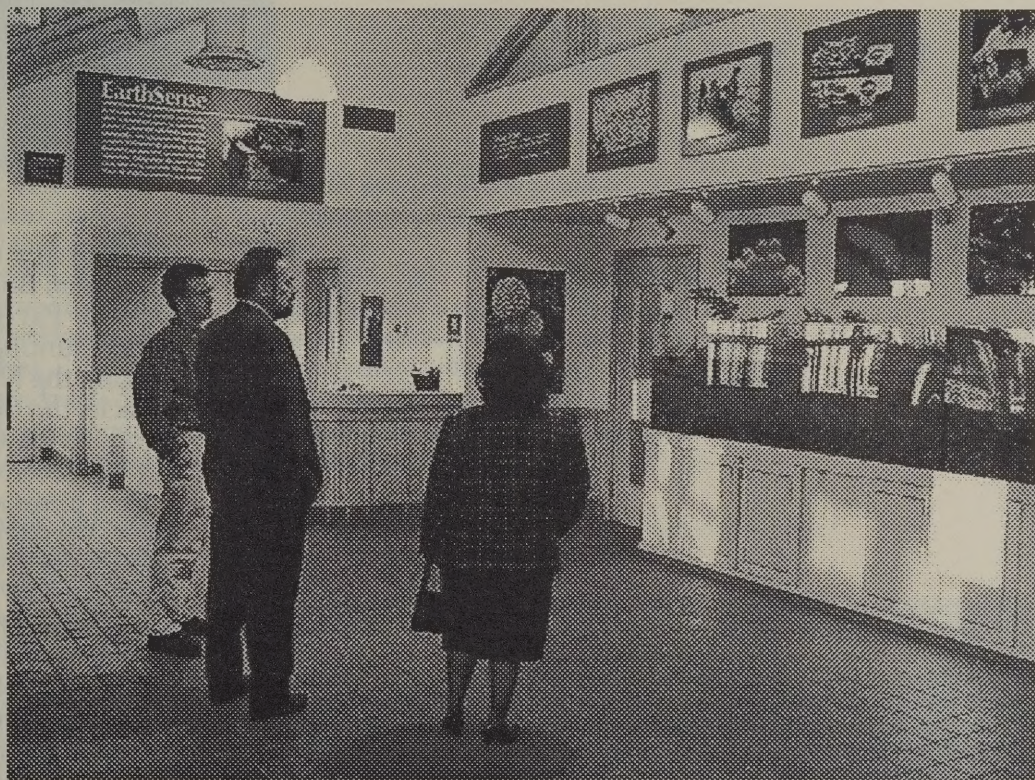




BLM-ALASKA FRONTIERS

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New BLM Director Pat Shea visits Alaska



Ed Bovy

BLM Director Pat Shea and Kim Harb (BLM Washington Office) view the Campbell Creek Science Center's stream aquarium, explained by Jeff Brune (Anchorage District Office).

When the Bureau of Land Management's new Director, Patrick Shea, made a vow to visit every BLM state for orientation, he meant what he said. Despite the logistical challenges of mounting a trip to Alaska on short notice, and a little less than two months after being confirmed, Shea, accompanied by his assistant, Kim Harb, arrived in Anchorage to begin an ambitious week of traveling all over the state.

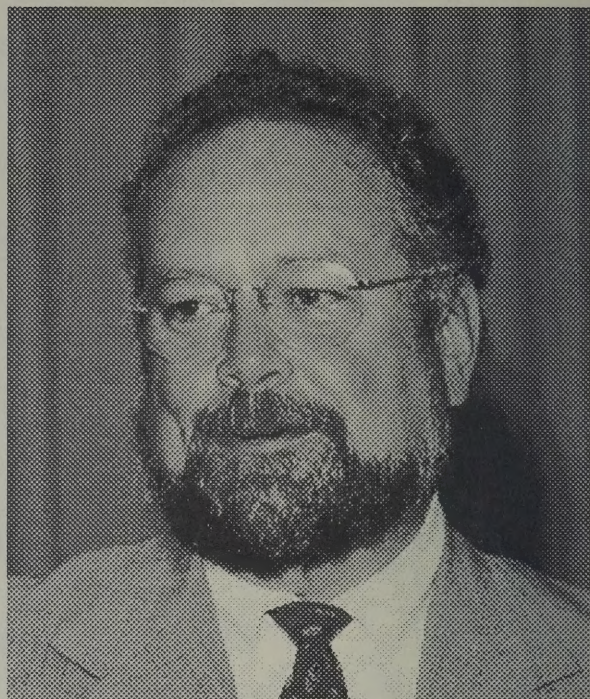
The Director presented his first Health of the Land Award while in Anchorage, to Cambior

USA, in recognition of the reclamation job the company performed at its Valdez Creek mine site in the Glennallen District. Shea praised the company's efforts by saying, "Cambior has been an outstanding example of how industry and government, working in a partnership, can make the concept of multiple use of the public lands work."

Shea's itinerary included visits to Prudhoe Bay, Kuparuk, and the community of Barrow on the North Slope.

—KJ Mushovic

New BLM Director tours Alaska



Arriving during whaling season, newly appointed Bureau of Land Management Director Pat Shea took time to observe the whale hunting subsistence lifestyle while visiting the North Slope. Riding an all terrain vehicle, the BLM director endured chilly winds to view the skeletons of several whales at Point Barrow.

Shea observed the erosion of the Alaska shoreline near Point Barrow. "The winds and waves were so strong on the beach near Point Barrow that they exposed the foundation of an abandoned Native home."

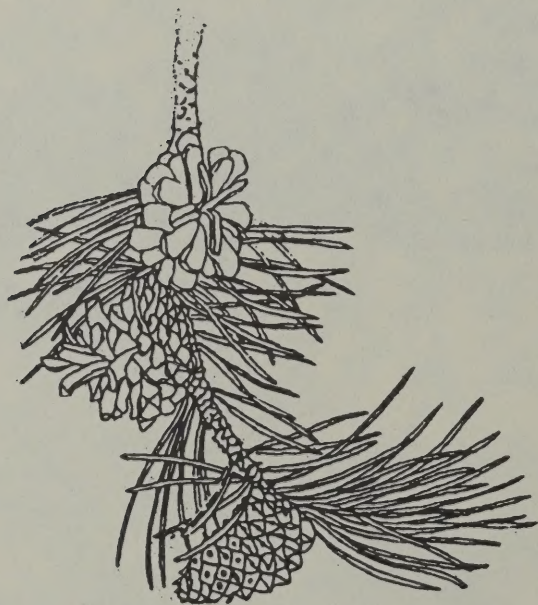
While in Barrow, Shea met with the mayor and several Native leaders, including Jacob Adams, President of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation.

Another opportunity to bundle up came when the director took a boat trip down the Gulkana River. The passengers on the boat faced winds and 30-degree temperatures. "The wildlife in Alaska is magnificent," says Shea. "We saw an eagle flying overhead and there were two eagle nests visible from the boat as we went down the river."

At Pump Station 4 of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, Shea viewed a "pig" — a device used to detect corrosion inside the pipe. The 800-mile pipeline is on a right-of-way across BLM-managed lands.

The Director's itinerary included stops in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Glennallen. At every BLM site, Director Shea sought opportunities to meet and speak individually to employees.

—Janet Malone/KJ Mushovic





Cambior USA receives Health of the Land and Partnership Award

BLM's new Director, Pat Shea, awarded Cambior USA, operator of the Valdez Creek Mine, the BLM Director's Health of the Land and Partnership Award for the environmental protection and reclamation work done at the site of the Valdez Creek placer mine. The Health of the Land Award nationally recognizes individuals and groups who have made use of federally-managed lands in the U.S. and done an exemplary job in restoring them to their natural state.

Valdez Creek, located approximately 180 miles north/northeast of Anchorage, had been mined almost continuously since 1903. The mine grew from a small hand placer operation to North America's largest placer mine. In 1987, Cambior USA bought into the Valdez Creek Mine, and by 1990 was the operator and had controlling interest. During the eight-year period Cambior operated the Valdez Creek placer, the mine produced 386,000 ounces of gold.

When Cambior USA took over in 1990 as the operator, they submitted a new plan of operation with the BLM which included reclamation proposals for the eventual mine closure and a reclamation plan for cleaning up disturbed areas left by many of Valdez Creek's previous operators. Cambior USA began the reclamation of these areas and initiated a drilling program to make sure mining efforts would be profitable before they began any activity.

During their active mining, Cambior conducted concurrent reclamation and reseeding on the property. By October of 1996, the company had completed the reclamation of the 600-acre site by infilling and landscaping, recontouring the creekbed to follow its original course, and removing all buildings and equipment. By mine

closure, 80 percent of the area had new vegetation, drawing moose as well as caribou to browse.

Tom Allen, State Director for BLM-Alaska, praised Cambior's efforts. "All during the operation, Cambior USA maintained a good neighbor policy with other land users including recreationists, hunters and other miners farther up the valley by insuring that there was always access across the mine."



BLM & Ducks Unlimited partnership — It's for the birds



Alaska's relative geographic isolation from the rest of the country encouraged state and federal agencies to naturally work together long before it became commonplace elsewhere. This has helped Alaska pioneer a tradition of interagency cooperation, good science and partnerships.

Beginning in 1988 through a Challenge-Cost Share Agreement with Ducks Unlimited, Incorporated (DU), the Bureau of Land Management has used satellite thematic mapper sensors to develop digital information on landcover (vegetation, water, ice and bare ground or a combination thereof) for high priority waterfowl habitats on public lands in Alaska.

"Satellite imagery lends itself to project partnering because it covers large regional areas and usually spans several different government and private land ownerships and/or management regimes," says Dick Kempka of the National Headquarters of DU. "BLM realized the power of using high technology tools and multiple cooperators to reduce the overall costs."

So far, the partnership between the BLM and DU, scheduled to exist until 2004, has resulted in digital landcover information for approximately

60 million acres of land in Alaska, at a cost of less than five cents per acre. The collection of landcover data is allowing BLM-Alaska to use geographic information systems (GIS) for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) planning area Environmental Impact Statement.

"We often use the Alaska GIS projects with BLM as a successful model for other agencies who express an interest in partnering with DU," says Kempka.

Other federal and state agencies, through the Alaska Geographic Data Committee, have requested similar partnerships with DU. In 1997, through this partnership, landcover information was developed for the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the North Slope Borough. In 1998, Ducks Unlimited, Canada, along with the Canadian Wildlife Ministry, BLM-Alaska and DU, will develop a similar partnership for the boreal forests of North America. Another three-year project will aid the U.S. Air Force in creating digital information bases for military operations areas in Alaska.

"The BLM has been very innovative with their approach to developing partnerships," says Kempka. "Seeking key agency people and freely distributing project information has brought down barriers that can impede progress on federal projects. Projects now have deadlines and definitive products that are completed on schedule because all parties understand the goal and have been involved from the initial planning stages."

Most of BLM's successful partnerships are for restoration, or otherwise site-specific areas that neither BLM, nor the partner could have accomplished alone. The DU/BLM partnership will result in much more digital landcover for Alaska land during the next five years and similar information bases for other resource agencies.

Kempka adds, "Leading by example is always the best method of being productive and BLM has embraced this attitude which will benefit resource management in Alaska for years to come. DU is delighted to be a partner in this project and salutes BLM for their foresight."

—Janet Malone

BLM Partnerships

Twenty federal agencies from five departments meet monthly in Alaska as the Alaska Geographic Data Committee. By coordinating spatial data development projects and sharing information about each other's priorities, agencies often contribute jointly to fund high priority projects that benefit many users, keep costs down and get the job done sooner. Alaska has been recognized as a model for submitting funding requests and has been very successful, primarily due to the interagency nature of the projects.



Partners in fire management

For the past 11 years, wildland fires in Alaska have been managed under a coordinated interagency fire management plan. The BLM/state partnership and interagency sharing of resources has resulted in one of the most effective and efficient fire management programs in the nation.

BLM has a reciprocal agreement with the State of Alaska and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that consolidates protection areas. BLM handles fires north of the road system; the state handles southcentral Alaska and the USFS takes care of southeast Alaska. This joint plan calls for a wide range of suppression options, ranging from all-out aggressive initial attack to monitoring fires burning on lands that do not warrant suppression expenditures.

BLM's Alaska Fire Service (AFS) provides wildland fire protection on 174 million acres of federal, state and Native corporation lands. AFS continues to aid other states' fire management efforts by providing smokejumpers, interagency hot shot crews, Emergency Fire Fighter crews, and prescribed fire and support personnel. The AFS and Canada's Yukon Territory assist one another in fighting wildfires on each other's land under two international agreements.

Outside the country, an agreement between AFS and Canada, signed in 1971, provides for AFS or Yukon resources to take initial attack action on fires within a 10-mile corridor beyond the international border. The second agreement signed in 1982 provides for AFS and the Yukon to assist each other when requested. The agreement may be activated when either agency is unable to respond to a fire situation within critical time frames. All costs incurred by either agency for action taken in support of the other are reimbursable by the benefiting agency.

The AFS also has been active in exchange programs with the National Aerial Forest Fire Protection in Russia since 1992. Russian fire service managers visited AFS facilities in 1992, followed by a visit by AFS managers to Russian facilities in 1993. Russian and AFS firefighters and smokejumpers have worked along side each other in both countries. AFS also hosted the Alaska portion of the International Wildland Fire Exchange last June, when 17 wildfire dignitaries from foreign countries were sponsored by the National Interagency Fire Coordination Center.

BLM considers new fire management plan for highway corridor

The Bureau of Land Management is considering an amendment to the Interagency Fire Management Plan to change nearly one million acres of land within the Dalton Highway Corridor from full protection to limited protection.

Representatives from the BLM Northern District Office and Alaska Fire Service are meeting to address the proposed amendment.

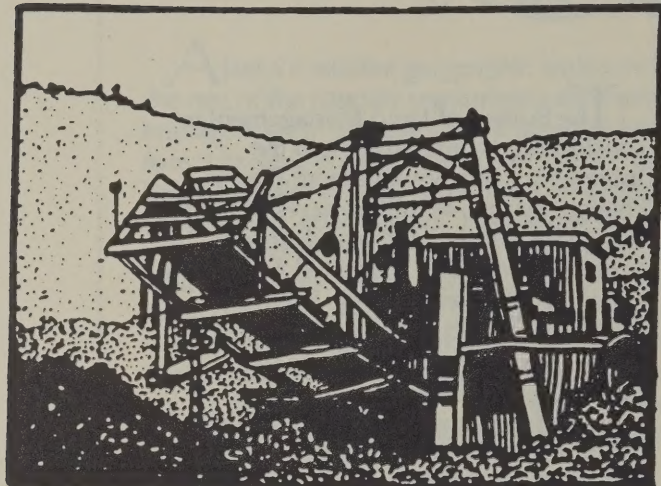
Randi Jandt, a wildlife biologist with the Northern District, said the change would affect 952,000 acres in the Dalton Highway area from the Yukon River to Galbraith Lake.

Under full protection, wildfires are controlled through immediate and aggressive action. Fires in limited protection areas are contained only enough to prevent escape into areas under higher levels of protection. Full fire protection would continue for critical sites within the corridor, including the communities of Coldfoot and Wiseman, and pump stations and remote gate valves along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Jandt said the BLM is working with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, which supports the change, and adjacent land owners and interest groups.

"Nowadays, people recognize that fire has an important role to play in forest ecosystems. Returning to a more natural fire management option will prevent the buildup of flammable fuels around sites that require protection and will result in substantial cost savings to the taxpayer," says Jandt.

Scoping meetings produce comments on changes to 3809 mining regulations



The Bureau of Land Management released a summary of the comments received during a public comment period on revision of the Section 3809 surface mining regulations. The regulations govern the surface management of minerals on BLM-managed land that are considered "locatable" under the General Mining Law of 1872. These types of minerals, which include gold, silver and copper, are often referred to as hardrock minerals.

More than 1,000 people attended eight BLM-sponsored "scoping" meetings and four public information meetings held throughout the country. About 65 people attended the two sessions held in Fairbanks in May, and an additional 1,800 individuals or groups submitted written comments.

BLM Director Pat Shea says the BLM is committed to working with all interested parties as it examines how to modernize the 3809 regulations. Shea was "extremely pleased" with the participation and input received during the scoping period.

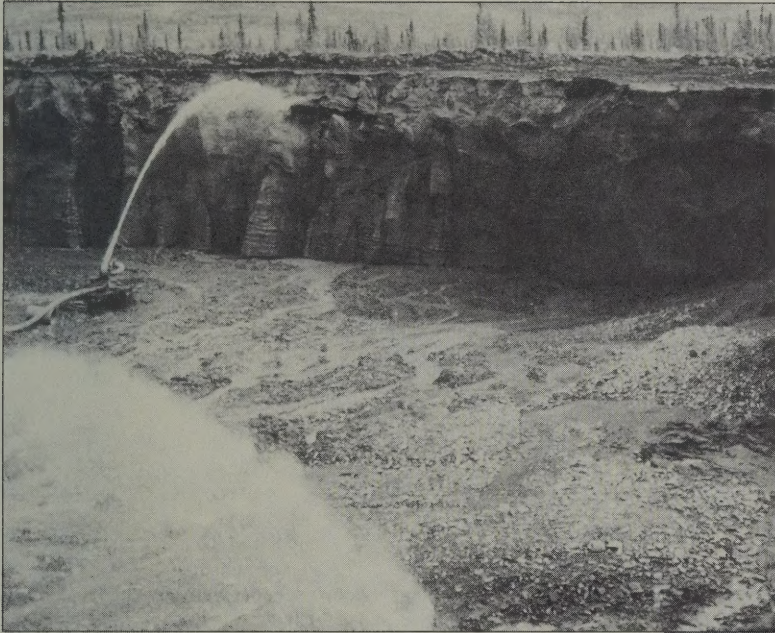
During the scoping period, which began in May, the BLM asked individuals and groups to focus on eight topics for discussion:

- the definition of "unnecessary or undue degradation" of BLM-managed lands
- the development of specific performance standards for mining and reclamation
- the five-acre disturbance threshold that differentiates a Notice-level mining operation from a Plan-level operation
- coordination between state and federal mining regulators
- the types and adequacy of penalties for violations of the regulations
- the review timeframes for Notices and Plans of Operations
- the definition of casual use of the public lands
- bonding requirements aimed at ensuring reclamation of land disturbed by mining.

The BLM also invited participants to comment on any other issues relating to the BLM's surface management program.

The BLM's summary of the 3809 scoping comments is available from any of its western state offices or from the agency's Washington, D.C. office. The summary is also posted on the BLM Home Page on the Internet (www.blm.gov).

Mining reclamation — Mother Nature's way



Water cannons or hydraulic giants melt the ice wall and frozen, gold-bearing gravels in a placer mine (left). Below, the same scene after the permafrost in the ice wall is melted and natural vegetation has grown.



Probably not many people have heard of the "3809" program (BLM loves to shorten names whenever possible). For those who wonder what it means, the term refers to "Subpart 3809 — Surface Management," in the Code of Federal Regulations. The 3809 program establishes procedures to "prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of Federal lands which may result from operations authorized by the mining laws." In Alaska this usually involves the operation of placer gold mines in the placer gravel of stream beds.

The reclamation of these placer gravel areas poses some very unique opportunities in Alaska where conditions produce aufice (sheets of ice spreading over existing ice), anchor ice (long-lasting stream channel ice frozen solid to the stream bottom), and permafrost (soils with frozen moisture lasting for years).

In certain situations, time and the forces of nature can be an alternative to using heavy equipment to reclaim mined lands. Reclamation of one mined area near McGrath, where higher precipitation is common, involved an ice wall (a high wall with permafrost)WS. To melt the ice, vegetation was stripped from the ground surface down to the frozen substrate. Then a water cannon or hydraulic giant sprayed water 24 hours a day, gradually melting the frozen ground down to gold-bearing gravel. The melted sediments flowed away from the site into settling ponds

where they were captured, leaving only the gold-bearing gravels in the pit floor.

After mining was completed, the site was left to the forces of nature. Over a six-year period, the exposed outer surface of the ice wall beneath the organic mat melted. The open edge of the organic mat gradually sank down to the bottom of the mining pit to the original ground level. As the ice wall melted, melt water and silt from the wall flowed across the mining pit floor, providing water and nutrients for the remarkably rapid growth of native vegetation.

Knowledge of these natural processes can allow the land manager and the miner to utilize the forces of nature as part of the reclamation process. While discretion is necessary when considering natural revegetation, it may provide a substantial cost savings over traditional heavy equipment alternatives.

—David Kelley/Lee Koss

The Bureau of Land Management is cleaning up the remains of an old camp on an abandoned placer mining site in the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River corridor. The ruins of the Wade Creek Mining Camp were considered to be a hazard to the public.

The site is north of Chicken (Milepost 66 of the Taylor Highway) on Wade Creek. The remains of two sheds and debris from a log cabin will be removed. The structures have not been used since the 1993 field season, and the BLM cannot use or rehabilitate them.

"This was not a typical mining operation, since most miners run a clean operation and do their reclamation work responsibly" says BLM Northern District Manager Dee Ritchie. "However, in this case the BLM is taking responsibility for protecting the health of our public land and ensuring public safety."

Ritchie says restoration of the aban-

doned site will improve the scenery along the Taylor Highway and discourage future dumping at the site.

The structures on the Wade Creek Mining Camp must be recovered before the State Department of Transportation (DOT) begins road construction on the Taylor Highway in 1999. The DOT will use tailings from the mining site to build the road, and at the same time will recontour the land around the Wade Creek site disturbed by past mining operations.

BLM Alaska Fire Service specialists are reducing solid waste on the site to avoid the expense of transporting it to the Tok landfill, 98 miles away. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation gave approval to the BLM to burn "a log structure and other burnable wood material at the remote ... camp." The cleanup project will also serve as a training exercise for fire personnel. Cleanup of the site will continue through next summer.

The Bureau of Land Management announced that it is changing the scheduled release of the Draft National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) by one month. The schedule change was made to insure that the best scientific information available is incorporated through the peer review process.

The change also will accommodate concerns expressed about the public comment period directly overlapping the holiday season.

The new comment period begins December 12, 1997, and extends to February 10, 1998.

The projected date for completion of the IAP/EIS (July 31, 1998) remains the same.

For additional information, call (907) 271-3664. For more information on the NPR-A, visit the BLM Internet home page at:
<http://www.ndo.ak.blm.gov/npra/>.

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